

## Mental Health and Wellness in New York State Schools

In last month's [CCSI News and Updates](#), we shared our interview with Glenn Liebman, CEO, Mental Health Association in New York State, Inc. (MHANYS) and Amy Molloy, Director of Schools Mental Health Resources and Training Center, MHANYS, where we talked with them about New York State's new law requiring schools to provide mental health education as a component of health instruction. NYS Mental Health in Education is a comprehensive framework that includes mental health as a critical part of one's overall health. Mental health, defined by the World Health Organization (WHO), is not just the absence of disease. It is a state of well-being in which each person can realize their own potential, cope with normal life stressors, work productively, and contribute to their community.

Did you know that the recent law is closely aligned with the knowledge, expertise and support that CCSI already delivers to New York State schools? CCSI staff have worked to integrate these new state expectations into current supports to provide enhanced training and consultation with schools. Two specific CCSI service offerings: "[Foundational Trauma-Responsive Care](#)" and "From Trauma to Healing – Building Trauma Sensitive Schools to Support Resiliency" mirror several areas of Mental Health Education Instruction. A core tenet of trauma-sensitive schools is creating positive school climates in which students and staff feel safe and secure, valued and respected. In fact, research has shown that school climate is integral to students' academic success. When staff understand the effects of trauma on brain development, including the presence of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), and can manage their own exposure to students' traumatic experiences, staff capacity to build positive relationships with students and each other increases. As a result of creating a trauma-sensitive school environment, students learn and practice skills for identifying emotions in themselves and others, learn how to manage strong feelings and build resiliency. Specific skills identified in both the NYS Mental Health Literacy in Schools and in trauma-sensitive school environments include building empathy and compassion for others and self (self-care skills), understanding the benefits of gratitude, communication skills, problem solving skills and the ability to set and achieve goals.

Additionally, Mental Health Literacy in Schools includes teaching students and staff to recognize signs and symptoms of mental illness and how to access resources in school and outward communities. CCSI provides hands on consultation and support to schools as they develop comprehensive policies and procedures to create district-wide prevention programs, intervention services and postvention support when working with students with mental health challenges. Specifically, CCSI supports schools with identifying risk factors, warning signs and protective factors for depressions and suicide, best practices for intervention and how to create a comprehensive crisis response to a student or staff death by suicide.

A recommendation from NYS for promoting mental health in the educational setting is "developing support for school staff for their own mental health and wellness." Demands on educators come from many directions. School staff are often working within high stress environments as they diligently meet the academic and social/emotional needs of students and families. People working in helping professions often "pay the price" for their caring in the form of secondary traumatic stress, compassion fatigue and burnout. When staff are not healthy, they cannot be expected to bring their best selves to school each day. CCSI provides consultation and support to staff in the recognition of signs of secondary traumatic stress, compassion fatigue and burnout. CCSI supports staff as they identify sustainable ways to create healthy lifestyles for themselves and put ideas into practice.

Finally, as schools move toward building trauma sensitive environments as a part of meeting NYS Mental Health Education Instruction in schools, CCSI's comprehensive, strength based, self-assessment for schools, provides schools with a tool which allows them to measure and review their degree of implementation. The **TRUST-S**, Trauma Responsive Understanding Self-Assessment Tool for Schools, uses the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) "10 Implementation Domains of a Trauma-Informed Approach." The assessment can be used by individual schools or on district level to create a snapshot or baseline of where a school is within their journey to become trauma-informed. Upon completion of the assessment, schools receive results that include recommendations for growing their trauma-informed practices. The TRUST-S is currently in the final stages of its piloting phase and will be made available on New York State's Trauma Informed website soon. Stay tuned!

To learn more about how CCSI can support your school with NYS Mental Health Education Instruction, please visit [CCSI's Practice Transformation page](#) and contact [Elizabeth Meeker, PsyD](#), Vice President, Consulting Services.